



# **National Farmers Union**

**Testimony of Mr. Joe Logan  
President of the  
Ohio Farmers Union**

**On Behalf of National Farmers Union**

**Before the  
U.S. House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation,  
Credit, Rural Development and Research**

**Tuesday, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004  
Washington, D.C.**

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Chairman Lucas, Ranking Member Holden, Members of the committee, I am Joe Logan, President of the Ohio Farmers Union. The National Farmers Union represents over 260,000 independent, diversified, owner-operated family farms and ranches across the nation. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the conservation programs of the 2002 Farm Bill. In the interest of time, let me get right at our list of conservation considerations.

Our National Farmers Union policy, developed by our grassroots members, is very clear on the issue of conservation funding. We strongly support public funding for soil and water conservation programs and the necessary technical support to properly implement them.

As farmers and ranchers, we acknowledge and accept our stewardship responsibilities to protect our natural resources for the generations to come. As businessmen and women, we recognize that we operate high-risk, low-return businesses adversely damaged by noncompetitive and concentrated agricultural markets, and that unlike other players in the food economy we do not, nor can we, pass on our costs of doing business. As farm credit borrowers, we realize the primary concern of our agricultural lenders is not the long-term protection of our natural resources for the future, but the short-term protection and repayment of their operating loan plus interest. We have supported efforts over the past few farm bills to increase the cost-share provisions of conservation programs to help, not only with improved conservation practices, but to share in the financial burden on farmers and ranchers farm-gate income when costly practices are encouraged, or required on working lands.

We believe that the 2002 Farm Bill is a long overdue step forward in conservation funding, while providing new initiatives and the expansion of existing programs. Like many of my Farmers Union counterparts, I am actively involved in helping make these conservation programs work.

The good news is that conservation program funding has increased. The bad news is the funding for the necessary technical assistance to help our farmers and ranchers put often complex conservation systems into operation has not kept pace with dramatically increased workloads. And we see the demand for conservation programs far exceeds funding nationally, and in Ohio.

With respect to new conservation initiatives, National Farmers Union supports wholeheartedly the landmark Conservation Security Program (CSP) provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill. But, we are very concerned that USDA has announced its plan for implementing the CSP in a severely restricted manner. By using a national watershed scheme to limit and determine participation in and eligibility for the program, a full-scale nationwide program as written in the farm bill law, is simply not possible.

While it's true a full-scale nationwide program for 2004 is not feasible because of a \$41 million budget cap for FY04, it is also true that the CSP FY04 budget cap comes off at the beginning of the new fiscal year in October of this year and the program returns to its 2002 Farm Bill status as a conservation entitlement program. We can only assume that the USDA proposed rule funding restrictions are intended to apply for 2005 and all future years. This should not happen.

It appears to us that the approach being taken by USDA is in direct opposition with the intent of the law as written, and will effectively eliminate the CSP as the nationwide, comprehensive environmental program intended by Congress in the farm bill. Congress made a promise to farmers and ranchers when the bill was signed into law. We urge Congress, and specifically the oversight responsibilities entrusted to the Agriculture Committees in both Houses, to keep that promise.

Over 14,000 farmers and other citizens wrote to USDA in response to the CSP proposed rule released at the beginning of the year, the most comments by far ever received by USDA for a conservation program. The overwhelming majority of those comments rejected the restrictive watershed approach, as well as other key problems with the rule, including the low payment rates. We urge the Administration to heed the public input gathered by USDA, and reverse course in the upcoming rule to implement the CSP for 2005 and beyond.

We fear that the current USDA approach will cause a very divisive and nonproductive fight for funding between livestock producers and crop producers, between geographical regions of the country, and between working lands conservation versus non-working lands conservation. That kind of battle may well spell the doom of the CSP. The farmers and ranchers of the National Farmers Union do not want that to happen.

We understand that the CSP interim final rule with request for public comments will be published in the Federal Register soon, and we encourage the NRCS to carefully consider all comments received during a 90-day public comment period in developing a final CSP rule. While we are encouraged that NRCS can conduct the program sign-up and implementation for this limited "capped" program this fiscal year, we see a much broader future for the CSP.

The CSP is the first agricultural conservation program to encourage a comprehensive approach to conservation on agricultural working lands. While we understand the initial reasoning for targeting watersheds, again, we would contend that CSP should be available to all agricultural producers throughout our nation, rather than in only a few watersheds. We also view CSP as a useful tool for managing the balance of payments in the WTO green, amber, and red box categories to farmers and ranchers in relation to our international trade obligations.

We are encouraged that the interim final rule, though seriously flawed in our opinion, will allow most types of working agricultural lands to be eligible for CSP. And we understand that producers on cropland, orchards, vineyards, pasture and range may apply for the program, regardless of size, type of operation or crops produced.

If I could summarize our views in a nutshell it would be that

- All of the conservation programs included in the 2002 Farm Bill should be implemented as Congress intended when it enacted the law, especially the Conservation Security Program.
- USDA should be encouraged to carefully record, consider and respond to public input on conservation programs rules. (The overwhelming public concern and negative responses expressed regarding the proposed CSP rule is an example of what we suggest as important public input)
- Funding for technical assistance to implement the farm programs must be increased to reflect the increased workloads. We should use mandatory program funds to finance both the financial assistance and technical assistance costs of the farm bill conservation programs.
- On working lands across the countryside we have seen the demand for EQIP, Grassland Reserve Program, Wetland Reserve Program, CRP and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program increase many times over the available funding. Congress must recognize this pent-up demand and provide for more opportunities for ranchers and farmers to participate in conservation programs.
- The landmark Conservation Security Program (CSP) provision of the 2002 Farm Bill should be put in motion as a full, nationwide and unrestricted program as written in the law. No reduction or limiting structures or schemes should be instituted in contradiction to the intent of Congress.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues in the days ahead to help fulfill the promise of the expanded conservation provisions provided for in the 2002 Farm Bill so that our farmers and ranchers have the tools they need to help protect our soil and water resources for the generations yet to come.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share our views with you today.